http://nvic.org/Loe_Fisher/blfinsight.htm

Reprinted with permission from Insight. Copyright 2000 New World Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.
www.ins

Q: Should parents be allowed to opt out of vaccinating their kids?

Yes: Children at risk for adverse reactions should be given a pass without penalty.

BY BARBARA LOE FISHER

Fisher is coauthor of **DPT: A Shot in the Dark,** *and cofounder and president of the National Vaccine Information Center in Vienna, Va., a non-profit organization.*

Parents do not want their children to be injured or die from a disease or a vaccination. As guardians of their children until those children are old enough to make life-and-death decisions for themselves, parents take very seriously the responsibility of making informed vaccination decisions for the children they love. That responsibility includes becoming educated about the relative risks of diseases when compared to the vaccines aimed at preventing them.

Like every encounter with a viral or bacterial infection, every vaccine containing lab-altered viruses or bacteria has an inherent ability to cause injury or even death. Vaccination either can produce immunity without incident or can result in mild to severe brain and immune-system damage, depending upon the vaccine or combination of vaccines given, the health of the person at the time of vaccination and whether the individual is genetically or otherwise biologically at risk for developing complications.

The fact that vaccines can cause injury and death officially was acknowledged in the United States in 1986 when Congress passed the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act, creating a no-fault federal compensation system for vaccine-injured children to protect the vaccine manufacturers and doctors from personal-injury lawsuits. Since then, the system has paid out more than $1 billion to 1,000 families, whose loved ones have died or been harmed by vaccines, even though three out of four applicants are turned away.

Since 1990, between 12,000 and 14,000 reports of hospitalizations, injuries and deaths following vaccination are made to the federal Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, or VAERS, annually, but it is estimated that only between 1 and 10 percent of all doctors make reports to VAERS. Therefore, the number of vaccine-related health problems occurring in the United States every year may be more than 1 million.

In the late 1980s, the Institute of Medicine, or IOM, and the National Academy of Sciences convened committees of physicians to study existing medical knowledge about vaccines and, in 1991 and 1994, IOM issued historic reports confirming vaccines can cause death, as well as a wide spectrum of brain and immune-system damage. But the most important conclusion, which deserves greater public attention and congressional action, was: "The lack of adequate data regarding many of the [vaccine] adverse events under study was of major concern to the committee. [T]he committee encountered many gaps and limitations in knowledge bearing directly or indirectly on the safety of vaccines."

Because so little medical research has been conducted on vaccine side effects, no tests have been developed to identify and screen out vulnerable children. As a result, public-health officials have taken a "one-size-fits-all" approach and have aggressively implemented mandatory vaccination laws while dismissing children who are injured or die after vaccination as unfortunate but necessary sacrifices "for the greater good." This utilitarian rationale is of little comfort to the growing number of mothers and fathers who watch their once-healthy, bright children get vaccinated and then suddenly descend into mental retardation, epilepsy, learning and behavior disorders, autism, diabetes, arthritis and asthma. Some adverse reactions are fatal.

As vaccination rates have approached 98 percent for children entering kindergarten in many states, there is no question that mass vaccination in the last quarter-century has suppressed infectious diseases in childhood, eradicating polio in the Western hemisphere and lowering the number of cases of measles from a high of more than 400,000 cases in 1965 to only 100 in 1999. Yet, even as infectious-disease rates have fallen, rates of chronic disease and disability among children and young adults have risen dramatically.

A University of California study published by the U.S. Department of Education in 1996 found that "the proportion of the U.S. informed consent to vaccination takes on even greater legal and ethical significance as we head into the 21st century. In a broader sense, the concept of informed consent transcends medicine and addresses the constitutional concept of individual freedom and the moral concept of individual inviolability. If the state can tag, track down and force individuals into state can take away in the name of the greater good tomorrow?

Parents, who know and love their children better than anyone else, have the right to make informed, voluntary vaccination decisions for their children without facing state-sanctioned punishment. Whether a child is hurt by a vaccine or a disease, it is the mother and father — not the pediatrician, vaccine maker or public-health